



THE NAVAJO NATION

RUSSELL BEGAYE PRESIDENT  
JONATHAN NEZ VICE PRESIDENT

CONTACT: Rick Abasta, Communications Director  
Office of the President and Vice President  
THE NAVAJO NATION  
Phone: 928-871-7247  
Fax: 928-871-4025  
Email: rickabasta@gmail.com

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## President Begaye, HUD Assistant Secretary Lourdes Castro-Ramirez Open Ft. Defiance Multi-Purpose Youth Center



*President Russell Begaye and Vice President Jonathan Nez watch local Navajo youth cut the ribbon to the \$6.7 million Office of Dine' Youth Multi-Purpose Youth Center on Friday morning. (Photo by Rick Abasta)*

FT. DEFIANCE, Ariz.—  
The ribbon has been cut and the new Ft. Defiance Multi-Purpose Youth Center is open to provide local and regional Navajo youth an opportunity for healthy activities in a safe atmosphere.

The 17,000 square foot facility was designed by Dylon Murphy Architects, P.C. and was constructed by Arviso Construction. The team broke ground for the \$6.7 million project on March 11, 2013.

The Ft. Defiance youth

complex features the new multi-purpose center, a skate park, playground, three baseball fields and the building for the Office of Dine' Youth on 23 acres of land located east of Tsehootsoi Middle School.

The price tag for entire complex is just under \$10 million.

On Sept. 11, Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye and Vice President Jonathan Nez joined Navajo Housing Authority, visiting officials from the U.S. Department

of Housing and Urban Development and others to celebrate the new facility.

Navajo Nation Council delegates Ben Bennett and Amber Kanazbah Crotty were also in attendance to celebrate area youth.

Alisha Damon, a staff member of Ft. Defiance ODY, provided the welcome address.

She said the new building is going to allow the office to do a lot more work to empower youth and emphasize physical fitness and living a healthy

lifestyle.

"We try to implement a variety of programs to the youth to grow. As they develop, our mission is to help them strive forward in the right direction," said Damon.

Ashley Mitchell, former basketball standout for Window Rock High School, gave the youth perspective on ODY and the services provided to Navajo kids.

"When I see this building, I see a place where children can go, a safe place. I grew



up around the people from the Office of Dine' Youth. It's a place where I felt safe and I felt wanted," Mitchell said.

"I encourage the students to take advantage of this building and make the best of it. Be thankful you have someplace to go," she added.

Guest speaker Harold Wauneka gave a community outlook on the youth complex and how the puzzle came together one piece at a time in interests of area kids.

He said during his tenure on the Navajo Nation Council, ODY did not have a place to go and they approached the Ft. Defiance Chapter in search of a building. Eventually the BIA was invited to the table and the group asked about the land.

"We had to start from scratch," Wauneka said, adding that the 23-acre tract was surveyed, including archaeological and biological clearances.

The Navajo Nation Council provided \$800,000 for the clearances. Next, Wauneka returned to the tribal council for the second phase: the design of the office building and the skate park, funded at \$2.4 million.

To this day, we got another allocation of \$6.7 million from NAHASDA, he said.

President Begaye and Vice President Nez introduced Lourdes Castro-Ramirez, assistant secretary at HUD. They presented her with a shawl and thanked her for traveling to the Navajo Nation to celebrate the new center and see the housing crisis firsthand.

Vice President Nez said the new building is going to empower the future leaders of the Navajo Nation.

"Take care of it, be sure you parents tell your kids and grandkids. Take care of it and it will last 50 years. We don't want any graffiti. We don't want any broken glass here. This is yours," Vice President

Nez said.

"We're really honored to have Lourdes Castro-Ramirez with us," President Begaye said, adding that she oversees more than 1,300 employees and \$26 billion in housing funds.

He said the main request from Navajo people is housing and that the Begaye-Nez administration is looking forward to working with HUD and NAHASDA to address those needs.

Castro-Ramirez said HUD is committed to expanding opportunities and working with partners.

"Community projects, community facilities, the Ft. Defiance Youth Center are essential in lifting up youth and families," Castro-Ramirez said. "We know that safe, affordable housing and economic opportunities are core necessities in every community and Indian Country is no exception.

"We work with 567 federally recognized tribes to support their efforts to preserve and expand the supply of housing for low income families and to develop community development projects like this youth center," she added.

The commitment by the Obama administration to improve the quality of life in Indian Country will continue and focus on three areas, she said.

"Preparing the youth for the higher education and the workforce, creating and supporting native communities and expanding economic opportunities," Castro-Ramirez said.



*President Begaye and Vice President Nez presented U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Assistant Secretary Lourdes Castro-Ramirez with a shawl. (Photo by Rick Abasta)*



*President Begaye and Vice President Nez sat with visiting dignitaries from HUD, Navajo Housing Authority and the Southwest Office of Native American Programs. (Photo by Rick Abasta)*



*Harold Wauneka, former council delegate for Ft. Defiance Chapter, provided a history of the entire youth complex and said the vision has now been realized for the \$10 million complex. (Photo by Rick Abasta)*